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of the animal kingdom. One should therefore endeavour to go to heaven or to secure re-birth in a respectable caste and good family. In the course of our investigations we found very few people who had even a hazy notion regarding the higher Hindu concept of *moksha* or salvation which secures the emancipation of the soul from all worldly obligations and ensures that it shall cease to take birth again and again in different shapes and forms. But the desire to go to heaven or to ensure a better birth is universal. From one's childhood, one keeps on hearing, often colourful and dramatic, accounts of heaven and hell. 'We shall have to account for our actions before God. We can deceive our family, our village, our caste, and even the established authority, but we can never deceive God. He has the record of every little thing that we do, and after death His agents will decide whether we go to heaven or to hell', is the refrain in the talk of most of the people when they are asked to explain their belief regarding the future of man after death. Descriptions of heaven and hell are vivid and imaginative. 'In heaven you have only to desire a thing and the next moment you find it there', said one of our informants. 'There is peace and plenty in heaven. All people live in luxurious palaces where an army of countless servants looks after all their comforts. There you have the choicest foods, and the best of everything,' explained a Reddi cultivator. A Madiga's picture of heaven was somewhat different. He said, 'When you go to heaven you have a comfortable house fitted with chairs, soft beds and velvet cushions. And you get all the rice that you want to eat, and all the sweets. And you can do what you like for there are no administrative or village officials to curse you and abuse you.' The descriptions of hell are fairly standardized. 'Hell is an awful place. It has several compartments, each one worse than the other. In one compartment roaring fires are kept eternally burning, in another there are deadly snakes, scorpions and crocodiles; then there is a large tank—several miles long—filled with pus and foul-smelling blood, swarming with maggots and hideous insects; and there are hundreds and hundreds of such compartments each with a different torture and punishment awaiting the sinners. According to the nature of their sins, wrong-doers are thrown into one of these sections to suffer the penalties for what they have done. They cry and scream and weep, but the warders in God's prison are merciless. The more the sinners cry, the more they are tortured.' The

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bath or wash is necessary to remove the impurity caused by the act. Non-observance of these rules will have a polluting effect; and according to the nature and degree of pollution purificatory rites will have to be undertaken.

Belief in ghosts and spirits is universal. They are feared and propitiated. Strange mystical power pervading certain objects is recognized, and fetishes and amulets are eagerly sought. Witchcraft is often suspected, and three or four people in the community are believed to possess magical powers.

Clearly, Hinduism as it is practised in the village is not the Hinduism of the classical philosophical systems of India, for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights nor the abstract content of the latter. It is a religion of fasts, feasts and festivals, in which prescribed rituals cover all the major crises of life. Worship and propitiation of gods and spirits follow the annual round of festivals and the ritual of the human life-cycle. Disease and difficulty may also necessitate invoking assistance from these sources.

In early childhood religious instruction through legendary tales and anecdotes exercises its influence on the developing mind of the child in whose thoughts and world of fancy these ideas linger on. Youth brings in its wake a more worldly and materialistic outlook towards life and its pleasures. Thoughts are turned to religion when the evening of life approaches, partly to postpone the final moment of departure as long as it could be, and partly to ensure the future lying beyond the point of death. Analysis of life-histories reveals that spiritualism cannot be said to be the keynote in the life of the community; far from it the religion appears to be a practical one. It strengthens and fortifies the individual and the group in situations where technical competence and practical intelligence are of no avail, and at the same time acts as a bond of cohesion for maintaining the structural unity of the society.

2. BELIEF: GODS AND DEITIES

The Muslims believe in one God, and follow the way of life laid down for them by their Prophet. They all belong to the Sunni division, and as such differ from the Shias and other splinter divisions of Islam in respect of the interpretation of their holy book as well as in several details of belief, ritual and ceremonial. Almost all the Muslims of Shamirpet have been converted to Islam from

Hinduism in the course of the last four or five generations.

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Muslims

RITUAL STRUCTURE

844 Among the Muslims an expectant mother is sent for the birth of her first child to her parents; subsequent deliveries generally take place in her own home. During her confinement she is attended by a professional midwife. An amulet is often tied to the
846 mother's waist to facilitate delivery. Within a few hours of its birth the child is bathed and clothed. His grandfather or an elderly relation says the prayers. A date is then dipped in honey and a drop or two of that honey is put into the mouth of the newborn child. Milk should not be given to the child before this has been done. On the sixth day the *chhatti* ceremony is performed.
[431] For this relations from both mother's and father's side are invited. They bring with them gifts for the child, comprising of sets of new clothes, dolls and playthings and possibly a silver spoon. The child
553 is dressed in new clothes. On the seventh day its head is shaved, and the elders give it a name. Depending on the means of the family, feasts are given to friends and relations on the sixth and seventh days, The mother continues to be out of the normal round of life for forty days. On the fortieth day she is bathed. The midwife is given her remuneration on this day. Once again there is a feast, and presents may be given both to the child and to the mother.

881 *Pre-puberty Rites.* Among the Hindus, the Brahmin and the Komti perform the sacred thread ceremony for the boys before they attain puberty. At these rites the Brahmin priest officiates. The Panch Bramha group of artisan castes also perform this rite; but they do not invite the Brahmin. Their caste-priest conducts the ceremony.

862 In the Muslim community a boy must be circumcised any time between the age of two and ten. A few relations are invited for the occasion, the boy is garlanded and then the operation is performed. It is usual to give small presents to the boy at this time. Another pre-puberty rite is the *bismilla* ceremony done both for
● [867] boys and girls. This initiates the child's religious instruction, for from now on it is taught the alphabet and is gradually enabled to read the Koran. In Shamirpet the *bismilla* ceremony is performed for all Muslim children, though relatively few of them learn to read the holy book.

881 *Puberty Rites.* Among the Hindus the girl's first menstruation is attended by elaborate ceremonies. She is secluded for five days, and at the end of this period is bathed and dressed in new clothes.